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Girl Culture, Revenge and Global Capitalism: Cybergirls, Riot Grrls, Spice Girls

CATHERINE DRISCOLL

This article considers the relations between the idea of 'girl culture' and images of politically radical popular culture through some recent forms of popular culture which represent girls and are, at least predominantly, directed toward girls—specifically, the riot grrl and 'cybergirl' movements, and the Spice Girls.¹ In this context I want to consider the dynamics of conformity and resistance that constitute 'girl culture' as a popular cultural form; the relations of this form to audiences of various kinds; and the roles assigned to and produced by girls in relation to popular culture in the 1990s. Finally I want to ask whether contestation over the meanings of girl culture and 'girl power' surrounding and pervading these groups have produced any kind of new relationship between popular culture, girls and feminism.

Spice Girls

When I began work on this paper in 1997, at the pinnacle of Spice Girls' success, my intended focus was girl culture as a phenomenon within globalised popular culture. But whenever I referred to this project, people asked about the Spice Girls—weren't they amazing, why the hell was I bothering with them, hadn't I had enough of them, could I explain why anyone bought their music? And if I began to talk about questions the Spice Girls suggest to me the response was almost always—are you trying to tell me you think they're a good thing? Whether or not the Spice Girls are good, for girls or as music, is not a question that interests me here, except insofar as I want to know why this is an issue—why so many people care about whether the Spice Girls are good, as musicians, or for girls. In particular, why do the Spice Girls need to be good for girls? What is the relationship between girls and the Spice Girls supposed to be?

Feminism, in the sense in which the term is used in the late 1990s, has always focused on popular culture because feminists are interested in the impact of modern life on women. But if there have been general agreements over the importance of popular culture to mapping ideologies and desires around modern women, there have been just as many heated debates internal to feminist analyses of popular culture.² What is less often noted is that feminism belongs to the popular cultural field as an influential force within twentieth-century discourses on women, a point feminist discussion of popular culture often seems to ignore even in fields where the influence of feminism is most clearly prevalent, such as in soap opera or pop music. I want to address girl culture as

a form of feminism as popular culture, but in the background of this article are two continuing themes from feminist analyses of popular culture. Firstly, rather than discussing cultural consumption as passive, most contemporary feminist approaches emphasise women's active deployment of popular culture, deployment which they argue is not simply functional for patriarchy or even capitalism. And yet, secondly, such analyses still very often want to ask why certain practices, forms or texts belong predominantly to women, and what women want—or, in a more carefully delimited form, what feminists want—in their consumption of popular culture.

The 1997 Music Television (MTV) awards began with a monologue by the host Chris Rock, in which he quipped that, despite their massive sales, he couldn't find anyone who would admit to having bought a Spice Girls' album. In fact the Spice Girls were the running joke of that telecast, consistently derided as not musical, not artistic, and all-round not sensible. Not only was their talent at issue, but their claims to have a political agenda were dismissed. This article will finish with the aspect of the Spice Girls which made such a dismissal possible—the relations between 'pop' and girl power. There I want to ask, alongside the numerous 'cultural commentators' who have commented on the Spice Girls, whether girl power is feminist. Is it a feminist analysis of popular culture, or itself feminist popular culture? What is, or was, the Spicey revolution revolting against, and how?³ But I'll begin with Rock's question—who buys the Spice Girls?

While generic expectations place Spice Girl consumers as pre-teens and young teens, predominantly female, this continues as yet to be a set of expectations.⁴ These expectations do not say anything about use or identification, however tempting it is to try and make them do so.⁵ More telling, I think, are the forms in which the Spice Girls have been marketed and merchandised. These indicate that, whoever actually buys the Spice Girls, they are marketed as for girls. It is girls, mostly, who buy sticker books or do girls' magazine quizzes on girl power (see Fig. 1). The leaflets in Spice Girls' CDs and posterbooks and videos which invite consumers to respond directly to the Spice Girls do leave open the possibility that boys buy these things, but the questions are mostly girl-oriented and the format is based on girls' magazines and music/television/star magazines marketed mainly to girls, all heady with similar calls for connection and identification. Or, while marketers anticipated that the 'Spice Girls Action Figures' might sell to boys, they were designed and marketed not to be new girly GI Joes, but to be action figures rather than dolls for girls.

Spice Girls are presented in their fan material as every girl:

they're the mirror of Every Girl who's out there slaving away in school or at a boring job, sick of being trodden on, waiting for the evening or the weekend to roll around so they can go out and have fun. They dress in the fashions ... that people buy every day from the High Street stores, the clothes Every Girl sees when she goes shopping at lunch time.⁶

Most accounts of the relation between the Spice Girls and their audience come down to asserting that this everygirlness, this 'pop' conformity, is a phase, and that girls who like the Spice Girls will grow out of it—and the accompanying products. The *Spice* CD notes ask who your favourite Spice Girl is, and display the gold rings inscribed 'Spice' on the outside and 'Girls' on the inside. While their official website has in the past been far more clearly directed to young girls than it is at present (the main icon for negotiating the site in 1996 and 1997 was the Spice Girls' pencil case, which has now been relegated to a subsidiary page), the site's information and advice exchange still conforms to the principal conventions of girls' magazines. You can take a quiz to find out which Spice

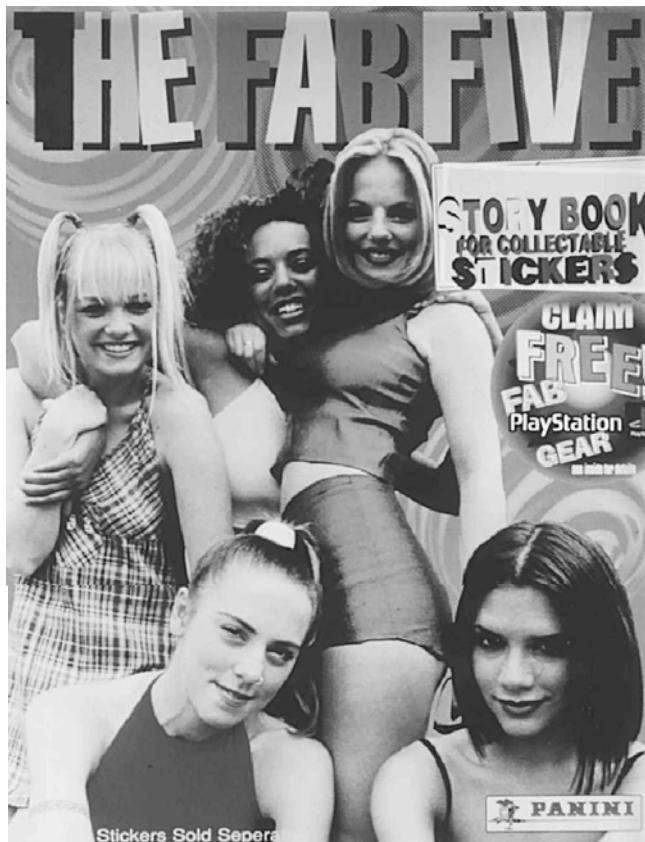


FIGURE 1. *The Fab Five: Story Book for Collectible Stickers* (Panini) London and Burleigh, Qld, 1997, front cover.

Girl you are most like, and enrol as a 'Spice Cadet'. Finally, towards the end of 1997 Australian MTV ran a '6th spice' competition, in conjunction with the Portmans chain of boutiques, in which you could win—hairstyling, make up, a personal trainer, and a trip to Rome for the European MTV awards to 'hang with the Spice Girls'. While these are conventional 'girl' prizes they also suggest that what is being invoked here is identification *with* and *as* a Spice Girl.

Invocations of Spice Girls' fandom work directly by identification: Spice Girls' fans are Spice Girls, the promotional material says so repeatedly; and, Spice Girls' fans wish they were Spice Girls—it says that too. Girls who like the group clearly know that they are not the same as the Spice Girls, and will not be, and yet they are also responding to statements that the Spice Girls are just like them. Moreover, the Spice Girls are figured as acting in the place of all girls, particularly when they act in ways which girls are predominantly encouraged not to—like kicking over tables in a social club in the 'Wannabe' video clip. Such tactics neither construct nor respond to this identification, but rather inevitably do both, and considering the forms of that process seems more productive than dismissing or admiring it. I want to compare this identification to some dominant models for understanding pop fandom among girls, and to intersect Spice Girls' fandom with other kinds of popular culture marketed directly to girls. But I would also like to prise this identification *as* and *as not* a Spice Girl out from the assumption that

young women are inevitably bound up in exceptionally close processes of identification, an assumption which has marked so much discussion of audiences and girls.

The Girl Pop Audience

The difficulty of discussing the relations between Spice Girls and their fans suggests the difficulty of 'identification'—an always unstable term due for further rethinking, and for which rethinking the Spice Girls are a possible beginning point. Considering the modes of identification necessarily deployed when girls buy the Spice Girls raises the very real imaginary relations people sustain with commodities in their lives, and the significance of identification as a relation to power. Initially, however, it seems worth reprising some established readings of girls as fans of pop music, all of which invoke identification along more or less psychoanalytic lines.⁷

British cultural theorists Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel claim that the pop stars girls admire 'are not remote stars, but tangible idealisations of the life of the average teenager'.⁸ Underlying this claim is the psychoanalytic principle that girls are often characterised by an over-investment in objects which reflects a fear of separation and difference. The counterpart to this argument has usually been that there are very few female performers for girls to 'look up to', and that boys with a degree of effeminacy will do instead as non-threatening role models and objects in relation to which a moderately more independent self might be produced. According to these readings, girls' consumption of pop music is bound into a transitory freedom between childhood and the impending future of becoming wives, mothers and adults. Sheryl Garratt argues, representatively, that:

Falling in love with posters can be a way of excluding real males and of hanging on to that ideal of true love for just a little longer. It is a safe focus for all that newly discovered sexual energy, and a scream can often be its only release.⁹

But when there are in fact quite a few women in 'Top 40' pop music, might girl-stars also work as a desired object in relation to which fans can rebel and relate, and how might this be articulated in relation to the double space of equality and otherness produced as the Spice Girls?

This dominant model of pop music consumption is situated in a domestic 'girl space' informed by privatised discourses on heterosexual reproduction, and held to be distinct from the technically informed, participatory relation to music belonging to more independent forms of 'youth culture'. 'Alternative' forms of girl culture, like the riot grrls or the cybergirls who I will discuss below, often question the boundaries or definitions of such 'girl space', while the Spice Girls seem more amenable to the sometimes limited range of spaces popularly allowed to girls. The Spice Girls might thus constitute a socially acceptable interest and means of grouping amongst girls, even as rebellious. But are the Spice Girls any more than that, anything closer to the pivotal identificatory moves Garratt suggests when she argues that for pop fans, 'Our real obsession was with ourselves; in the end, the actual men behind the posters had very little to do with it'?¹⁰

Consumption enfolds and engages individuals with the material world and it articulates identities and communities. According to these influential models for talking about them, the Spice Girls belong to a group wrapped up in negotiating their own power and powerlessness through consumption. Yet an intimacy with consumption is supposed to be the main problem with the Spice Girls—they are popularly represented as defined,

delimited and extinguished by consumption; and in this they are intimately connected to a long history of employing girls as figures for, rather than just instances of, consumption. One way of considering the implications of this intimacy might be to ask how putatively alternative forms of girl culture relate to the widespread conception of girls as mainstream, and of 'girl culture' as a culture of consumption. The idea of the girl market is a significant historical context here. In the first half of the twentieth century the association of girls with mass culture was already drawing on the newly discovered marketplace of adolescents, and particularly adolescent women. The repeated references in the writings of the 'Frankfurt school', to take an influential example, to girls as exemplary dupes of culture industries are contemporary with the new 1920s and 1930s 'science' of market analysis, which began to observe and discuss the importance of marketing, often utilising girls as exemplary of mass cultural consumption.¹¹ The 'entertainment industries' continue to be both a privileged outlet for new practices of consumption and a discourse on and mode of disciplining and producing those practices. Within these now even more convincingly 'globalised' industries, the 'youth market' appropriates both non-conformity and the popular—the 'non-conformist' being one of its regular marketing labels.¹² At a tangent to the youth market, advertising to the girl market has always utilised relations between conformity and non-conformity. The teenybopper figure so often cited in studies of girls and popular culture exemplifies representations of girl culture as a conformist mode of resistance—a strangely unsettling conformity which carves out a space of excess within limitations on girl-life; within the good girl's life.

Popular recognition of a girl audience for mass culture usually leads to more or less direct claims that girls are easily deluded. In discussions of the Spice Girls, enough people refer to this delusion in enough forums that it seems worth asking why Spice Girls' fandom is exemplary of delusion, even compared to bigger 'market conformities' (usually the criteria provided) like wearing Nike or drinking Coke. This delusion is in fact an attribution that draws weight from being perceived as a girl thing. More considered accounts of the problem with Spice Girls' fandom claim that the authentic desires of girls have little outlet and are thus understandably, if regrettably, projected onto a commodity invented by marketers. But this explanation seems equally dismissive. Is the machinery that produces the Spice Girls hostile to and destructive of a 'real' girl culture—offering some expression of girls' desires but encouraging passive conformity in the long term? And, are there alternatives?

The Spice Girls very successfully claim to be what girls want, and the usual grounds for dismissing this claim is that they are just a glossy pre-packaged commodity. The usual story of their origins—that they were brought together by managers through an ad in a theatre magazine—is a principal reference here. Anna Golden's *The Spice Girls*, a book designed to explain the Spice Girls to Americans, relays this story in detail and qualifies it, in fact they left that management to pursue 'their own vision' for the band. It also explicitly addresses the question of the girls' image as manufactured, contrived and concocted:

When you get right down to it, does it really matter that someone else brought the Girls together? ... By the time the world first saw them, in June 1996, they were already raw, loud, blunt, bold and in-yer-face—in other words completely themselves. ... So how could this be the new manufacturing process for pop stars?¹³

In response to their reputation as a talentless package, the Spice Girls embarked on a

world tour—which was not halted by accusations that their performances were inadequate, by the illnesses of several members, or the mid-tour departure of one of the five members of the group—and also launched a film, *Spice World*, parodying their own manufactured images and image as manufactured. The film had several alternative possible titles, including *Five* and *Spice Girls: the Movie*, but was always conceived with the tag: ‘They don’t just sing’.

In the 18 months following the Spice Girls’ appearance they had produced ‘No. 1 singles’ in 37 countries, and despite scepticism and predictions of failure, their second album, *Spiceworld*, produced more ‘Top 10’ hits and more extraordinary sales figures. Popularity does not establish value or the absence of it, if value is a useful criterion for considering popular music.¹⁴ But manufacture, fad and popularity were a series of accusations routinely levelled at the Spice Girls. More interestingly, the degree of attention paid to the Spice Girls was not referred to their success or their value any more than to debates over what constitutes feminist politics or comment and the ways girls might identify with other girls or, more unusually, with politicised slogans. Take the following description of the Spice Girls from the British magazine *Melody Maker*. ‘High Street glamour, cartoon feminism, and shouting. Now that’s what we call a pop group.’¹⁵ But when did any form of feminism become the image of a pop group? The Spice Girls raised a series of questions less routinely applied to girl pop groups: can anything feminist be so prominently popular (even for a short time)?; can feminism be a mass-produced, globally distributed product?; and, can merchandised relations to girls be authentic? A comparison between the Spice Girls and the riot grrls might be utilised to ask whether any involvement in mass produced culture is a form of conformity, or whether you can merchandise a revolution.

Riot Grrls

This comparison would also consider the contradictory claims to authenticity which mark the Spice Girls’ relation to those forms of girl culture more usually associated with feminist politics. The Spice Girls’ claims to authenticity invoke the experience and passion of ‘ordinary’ girls, and various related claims to show how things really are for girls now, as well as how they could be. These are claims to display a truth that can be acknowledged, and purchased, by fans and other consumers. This thematisation of authenticity encompasses their music, dance routines and other visualisation of the Spice Girls’ style, and their lyrics, but not as an aesthetics to which the political dimensions of their appeal are subsidiary. Girl power is the most prominent aspect of saleable Spice Girl authenticity, though its status as a marketing tactic is not straightforward. The early UK cassettes were printed with little of the rhetoric—only a brief reference to the ‘Spice Girl Experience’, and the decision to elaborate on this experience appears to have responded to the success of the group and their public use of feminist slogans, including the banner slogans on the cover of their phenomenally successful debut CD *Spice*:

WONDERWOMAN—THIS VIBE IS CONTAGIOUS, FEEL IT, CATCH IT—IT’S A GIRL’S WORLD—SHE WHO DARES WINS—IT’S A GIRL THANG—COME ON BABY—THE SPICE SQUAD ARE HERE

WHAT YOU LOOKING AT BOY?—CAN YOU HANDLE A SPICE GIRL?—SILENCE IS GOLDEN BUT SHOUTING IS FUN—FREEDOM FIGHTERS—FUTURE IS FEMALE—SPICE REVOLUTION

Despite these strategies or tactics, the Spice Girls are widely discussed—in the mass

media, in specialist music and political publications, and in a variety of public forums—as having no kind of authenticity at all, and in this discussion they are aligned to many other groupings of girls, including Go Go Girls or Bond Girls. But any girl reference will do, even to the riot grrls—girls spelt with a growl and not an I. The American cover of the July 1997 *Rolling Stone* makes that reference with ‘Pop Tarts: Spice Girls Conquer the World’—riot grrls being entwined with the ‘alternative’ girl culture producers who label themselves Pop Tarts.¹⁶ Comparisons between the Spice Girls and riot grrls are often made in order to condemn one of them. While riot grrl zines and sites decry such pop phenomena as the Spice Girls, some of the Spice Girl fan material describes the riot grrls as dull and dour, whining, self-pitying and sexless—which are, interestingly enough, some of the same accusations riot grrls have levelled at ‘second wave’ feminism. But what’s riot girl, grrl, grrrl?

Riot grrls are easier to define than such loose girl culture scenes as ‘teenyboppers’, despite heated debates over the interests, allegiances, and even spelling of riot grrl. There are 1, 2 and 3 R versions of the girl that riots, often defined by her more or less close allegiance to girl bands influenced by punk.¹⁷ The premier riot grrl band is Bikini Kill, and like many other writers on riot grrl I will use Bikini Kill as exemplary (though not definitive) of the movement, though also on the list are: Babes in Toyland, Bratmobile, Cold Cold Hearts, Hole, Sleater-Kinney, The Third Sex, 7 Year Bitch, The Macrobiotic Boat and others. Riot grrls repeatedly attempt to define and even enumerate themselves, particularly in small circulation zines, and web or electronic zines (e-zines). The two r grrls accuse the three r grrls of claiming a superior badness: ‘maybe that third “r” is like a proud scarlet letter, a matter of haute transgression and baaaddddness stumbled over, a door slammed, a curse hurled’. This is from the ‘Poptart’ home page, where the owner claims ... ‘It’s actually [sic] pretty cool that grrrl/grrl/grl has entered the language as such. Nobody ‘owns’ it, ya know’.¹⁸ But ‘owning’ is the explicit focus of this antagonism. The *Riot Grrl* e-zine changed its name from three to two rrs in order to get a patent on the term, prompting a surge of outrage—which seems telling concerning the parameters of riot grrlness and its tense distinction from cybergirls, the alternative girl culture scene I want to turn to next. The following is an exemplary letter of complaint:

The web is not the universe. riot grrrl is still very much alive, not in your sorority girl circles, but in real life, grass roots, punk communites [sic]. alive in people who don’t own computers or have email addresses. media conglomerates [sic] and webpages do not an organization make.

In response, the editors write:

It’s a case of mistaken identity, grrls look for information about the Riot Grrrl organization and are lead [sic] unwittingly to RiotGrrl webzine, a non-affiliated publication with the same name.

Riot Grrrl resources on the web are scarce. There just isn’t much out there about this ‘organization’. When the grrls are directed to RiotGrrl, the webzine, they experience a mixture of confusion and anger. This webzine isn’t the punk rock, Bikini Kill influenced world, filled with vitriole [sic] that they are looking for.¹⁹

Riot Grrl—‘Riot Grrl changes lives!’ (see Fig. 2)—features stories, competitions, quizzes, games (like ‘Feed the Supermodel—Feed her now!’), letters to the magazine, and lists for exchanges with other riot grrls, a format derived directly from girls’ magazines. It initially included a section on feminism (‘FemRiot’) and ‘international’ sections which articulated



FIGURE 2. Home page logo, *Riotgrrl*, <<http://www.riotgrrl.com/>>, 8 October 1997.

it as part of a global movement but, especially in reference to 'other' sites like the now outmoded link 'Down Under' to the successful Australian *Geek Girl* e-zine (see Fig. 3), remained relative to its American-ness.²⁰ While various riot grrls war over representing themselves in any way, they often define their interests and agendas by reference to particular images, bands or tracks, particularly 'Rebel Girl' by Bikini Kill, sometimes referred to as the Riot Grrl Anthem.

Rebel Girls

'Rebel Girl' might be the most 'mainstream' sounding track on the *Pussy Whipped* album, but it is nevertheless not evident that, despite their antagonism towards one another, the Kill's lyrics ('Rebel Girl you are the queen of my world') are more radical than those of opposing riot grrl icon Hole ('I wanna be the girl with the most cake'). But both are supposedly different from the Spice Girls because of their explicit interrogation of the representation of girls. The cover of *Pussy Whipped* emphasises this critique in obscuring or vandalising the faces of the band members (see Fig. 4). The Spice Girls are, in opposition to this interrogation and erasure, extensively visualised in ways that don't directly mediate their music. The visual representation of their songs as narratives specific to girls (or young women) is crucial to the kinds of identification that comprise being a Spice Girl fan—the centrality and number of the outfits certainly matters a lot—but the idea of 'girl power' is also part of this visualising system, and it too must be seen. The back of the *Spice Girls: One Hour of Girl Power* video exclaims: 'We don't only talk about girl power, we live it! Just watch!' The music video revolution and MTV have of course been influential in enforcing this distinction between the accessibility and coverage of groups like the Spice Girls and groups like Bikini Kill. However, it is simplistic to assert that the Spice Girls are reducible to their image as video-oriented pop music, and distinguishable from live performance-oriented alternative music. Much of the dominant 1990s girl-band aesthetic draws on Bikini Kill, Hole and other alternative groups. As various zines and e-zines note, riot grrls not only produced feminist texts, but

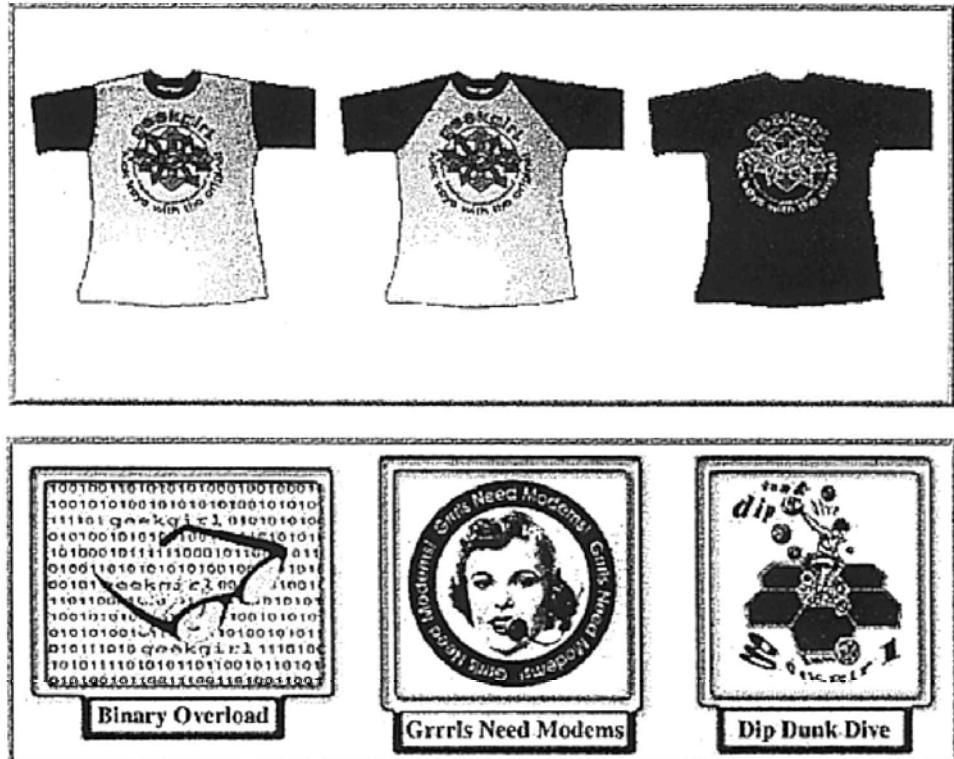


FIGURE 3. From 'Geekgirl Merchandise Page', *Geekgirl*, <<http://www.geekgirl.com.au/geekgirl/004maid/neworder.html>>, 18 October 1997.

also inspired various fashion and aesthetic statements, often 'little girl' looks or 'hyper-sexy' looks as part of a resistance to what was often perceived as a desexualisation of girls among feminists.

While they have very different approaches to the figure of the girl fan or of the girl audience,²¹ the Spice Girls and riot grrls both question whether girls have a special need for expression specific to them. The Spice Girls' slogans and appeals certainly include 'domestic' or home-based or home-oriented teenagers or pre-teens, while Bikini Kill has primarily a college/university audience. Far fewer girls are likely to have a space to listen to Bikini Kill than to the Spice Girls, but this does not mean that the Spice Girls are likely to be consumed in any homogeneous way. Girl audiences are not adequately understood by dividing popular music up into hierarchies of popularity, or lyrical or musical innovation, or of resistance. 'Mainstream' and 'subcultural' are hard to disentangle in the context of middle-class grunge looks and riot grrl fashion lines. The generic conventions of pop and punk music, rather than political content, distinguish the Spice Girls from Bikini Kill, conventions which shape the language in which they speak and thus many claims about their presumed audience. These distinctions are interesting ones in considering the diversity of girl-audiences and girl-effects, but if subculture is not a sensible way to talk about the Spice Girls it might not be the most interesting way to talk about Bikini Kill either. We might, for example, think about the processes of intimate identification between girls and between girls and music which the politics of both Bikini Kill and the Spice Girls are attached to. This doesn't require homogenising all forms of

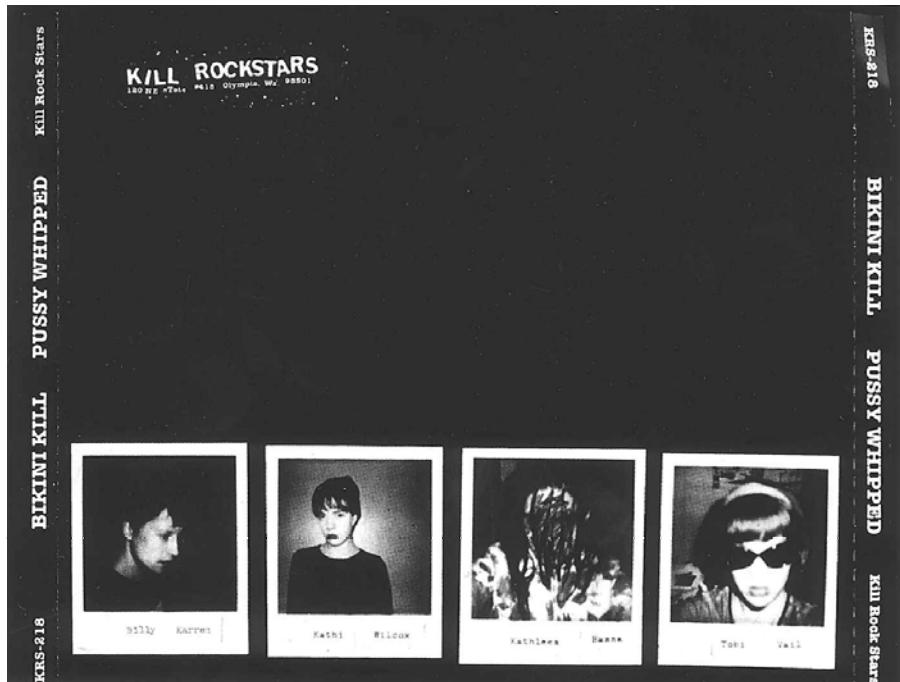


FIGURE 4. Bikini Kill, *Pussy Whipped*, Kill Rockstars, 1993, CD back sleeve.

music addressed to young women, but a recognition that Bikini Kill too is bound up in the production of identification which girl pop music foregrounds. As Holly Kruse points out ‘as much as the word “identification” seems to imply a sense of belonging, perhaps even more it describes a process of differentiation ... Senses of shared identity are alliances formed out of oppositional stances’.²²

As the promotional material for both the Spice Girls and riot grrls take up conventions of girls’ magazines, a genre which also raises questions about looking at girls, it might be helpful to turn to that genre for a comparison which elucidates this field of identification.²³ Diana Fuss discusses the ‘spectatorial’ object of women’s magazines ‘Not as an object of desire but rather a point of identification’,²⁴ while still differentiating between desiring to be and to have the woman.²⁵ Looking for a model of desiring identification which would acknowledge the greater immediacy of identification demanded by girls’ magazines, Eve Sedgwick’s account of ‘an erotic discourse ... that makes available a continuing possibility for symbolizing slippages between identification and desire’ also seems relevant.²⁶ This describes a homoeroticism which is neither decided nor in question for these girl culture modes—which are, after all, eroticisations of commodities. But like girls’ magazines they do not distinguish between *desiring* and *being* ‘the girl’, producing an identification which functions as a production of desiring *as being*.

Considering the continuities and discontinuities between what the Spice Girls and Bikini Kill resist, and what they lay claim to, would go a long way towards mapping the contemporary parameters of girl culture. Introducing a third term might help avoid dichotomies which simplify the distinction. Cybergirls (or cyber-grrls) are constituted

across a broad but allied range of websites, mailing lists, and other computerised artistic and political practices interested in women, technology and the image of the future. Cybergirls are often intersected with riot grrls, not only because there are hundreds of websites connecting the two, but because they share a number of modes of critique and production. Cybergirl pages and books and review sites—like *Surfer Grrls*, a guide to the Internet—often cite Bikini Kill as a soundtrack or riot grrl as a model or an ally.²⁷ Cybergirls constitute a significant mode of cyber-feminism, utilising the Internet against ‘hegemonic’ constructions of that technology—learn how to negotiate your way around patriarchy and the net. ‘Cyberfeminism’ itself tends to utilise the girl as an emblem of women in the future—the newly born technological woman.²⁸ Like riot grrls, cybergirls are strongly identified with collectives while also committed to individualism in the established feminist pattern of collectivising individual experience. While the revolutionary claims of cybergirls are similar to those of the riot girls, they more directly privilege appropriation and insurrection from within rather than from a separate space: the cybergirl image of revolution is not refusal but a kind of computer guerilla warfare. Being confined to the Internet, cybergirls are required to make a space within the discourse they oppose, which is one of the reasons why feminists have found them so attractive, if only as a metaphor—an argument made explicit in VNS Matrix’s accounts of why they utilise computer games and ‘cyberspace’ as a revolutionary feminist medium.

Global Girl Culture

American theorist of popular music Andrew Goodwin summarises much commentary on ‘subcultural’ musical forms in arguing that their ‘perceived authenticity derives in no small measure from ... [an] antipathy to popular culture’ and to, as Goodwin puts it, ‘commercialism’.²⁹ But of course marketing and a degree of commercialism are also necessary to ‘alternative’ popular music. The distinction between these alternative girl culture forms and the pop culture of the Spice Girls seems to be the authenticity of their productions, that alternative girl culture relies on the integral presence of the girls themselves in the processes of producing girl culture. Bikini Kill make their own zines, as cybergirls make their own sites. But the music industry by which Bikini Kill circulates, and the Internet, by which both riot grrls and cybergirls circulate, are not fundamentally opposed to the circulation of Virgin records. The localised production of girl culture through websites or zines—what is sometimes called DIY girl culture—is certainly a significant development among visible forms of cultural production, but does it require a rejection of mass or globalised culture?

Kathy Bail introduces her well-known Australia collection on DIY feminism as follows:

Riot grrrls, guerilla girls, net chicks, cyber chix, geekgirls, tank girls, super-girls, action girls, deep girls—this is the era of DIY feminism. For young women, rather than one feminism there are a plethora of feminisms going under new and more exciting tags. ... This change is allied with a do-it-yourself style and philosophy characteristic of youth culture.³⁰

This odd definition of youth culture aside, both the Spice Girls and riot grrl as DIY feminism re-articulate the tension between group identity and individualism which characterises late twentieth-century feminism more widely. But as these versions of feminism are each also responses to mass-produced popular culture it is worth further considering how the cybergirls’, the riot grrls’ or the Spice Girls’ claims to feminism mesh with their relations to globalised popular culture and global capitalism.³¹

Under the search terms feminism and/or women's space, you'll find Planet Cybergrrl® (registered trademark) and the Cybergrrl village. The trademark matters insofar as cybergirls are also marked by a broad ambivalence concerning their own commercialism and their reliance on the economic viability of the Internet. There is an incorporated cybergrrl! site <<http://www.cybergrrl.com/>>, and in her DIY article Rosie Cross notes that '*geekgirl* had to pursue people and companies in the USA who were using our trademark'.³² Yet, at the same time, she insists that the 'Internet is offering an alternative to commercialism, capitalism and profit for profit's sake'.³³ There are decidedly anti-capitalist tactics among cybergirls, like the Guerilla Girls' counter-advertising projects; but even here the paradox operates in the girls' slogan—'reproduce our images today'—being available only on the Internet.³⁴ If there seems little point criticising cyberfeminist action as confined to cyberspace, because in fact this is the primary object and only possible forum for their politics, a similar justification of the Spice Girl's relation to either the existing everyday life of girls or the global music market is possible. Cybergirls broadly emphasise and oppose the patriarchal control of technology—variously phrased as 'male', 'phallocentric', or 'cyberhegemony': 'we are the virus of the new world disorder; rupturing the symbolic from within; saboteurs of big daddy mainframe'.³⁵ Girls as 'future cunt'³⁶ are the accessible counterpart to the maternalised imagery of 'VNS Matrix' for what might be called the cybergirl movement.

References to VNS Matrix are very common on cybergirl sites, often, along with Sadie Plant, cited as an older sister or mother figure. Indeed riot grrls, cybergirls and the Spice Girls are all strongly invested in genealogies or histories of women's resistance. The alternative girl music scene is often represented as only one visible instance of riot grrl. An article titled 'Courtney Love = Riotgrrl' includes this quick history: 'Cleopatra, Mary Magdalene, Joan of Arc, the Suffragettes, Carrie Nation, Suzi Quattro, Cher, The Runaways, the Slits, Annie Sprinkle, Alternagrrls'.³⁷ The Spice Girls cite figures like Madonna and Neneh Cherry in pop music, although they also refer to their mothers and sisters in feminism (Golden's book on the Spice Girls phrases this as 'hippie mother' and 'academic big sister'), but some of their selections are less obvious—like Margaret Thatcher, famously called 'The Original Spice Girl'.³⁸ Although this claim has had the effect of placing the Spice Girls as more conservative than they might otherwise be thought, this association worked primarily in its context as a localising narrative: Thatcher is represented as rescuing Britain from losing its identity to globalisation and Americanisation. The Spice Girls refer repeatedly within and outside their lyrics and vocal styles to their accents, to their local identities. They won't sell out like the Beatles and move to America. They're proud to be British (see Fig. 5). The Spice Girls insist on a regionalism that separates them from an immediately recognisable global culture, although this might also be a spectacle of variations on the global.³⁹ Despite their own success in the field of global popular culture, the Spice Girls still represent themselves simultaneously as global—every girl around the world (the 'Generation NexT' to quote their multi-million dollar Pepsi ad)—and local. They share this tension with the riot grrls, which despite its globalised forms has also remained a carefully located north-west United States movement. Bikini Kill's 1996 release *Reject All American* is thus both localised critique—reject the concept of 'All American', the homogenising commodification of American—and also a response to Americanisation as globalisation.

Each of these movements or groups is broadly technophilic, and reliant on the mass media, and yet each expresses a degree of antagonism towards global capitalist interests. Sometimes this is expressed as an ecological stance, a protection of the planet (by, perhaps paradoxically, technological means); as a refusal of 'global capitalism' more



FIGURE 5. From *Rolling Stone* (United States edition), 10–24 July 1997, p. 76.

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explicitly; in a general opposition to 'how men have organised the world'; or through the recurring image of girls battling for justice in a wasteland brought about by industrial stupidity or violence. This last image is evident, for example, in the Spice Girls' 'Say You'll be There' video clip, and in the riot grrl related comic strip *Tank Girl* (and its utilisation in popular cinema). Both are narrativised as girls reclaiming the wasteland, which is also that place outside the fixed civilising space of social order including humanism, heterosexuality and the nuclear family. These stridently opposed and yet interweaving modes of girl culture thus propose an aesthetic and a political utopia, constructed both from within patriarchal global capitalism and from its margins. Much of the avowed anger of contemporary girl culture is directed against the global economics that maintain them, then, as well as against patriarchy—as both *Tank Girl* and the 'Say You'll be There' clip also suggest. The patriarchal frame in which girls are constituted in utilitarian ways as daughters and future wives and mothers—and as the process of properly conditioning women to repeat this constitution—is not global. It is instead precisely local in all the ways which problematise feminist accounts of other cultures from within their own. But patriarchy has globalised forms, and the globalisation of entertainment and information are fields in which a globalised feminist politics might also be enacted. But neither patriarchy nor global capitalism and its effects encompass the critiques produced by these feminist modes of girl culture—which are just as certainly critiques of feminism.

Pivotal to the declared opposition of contemporary girl culture to some forms of feminist politics is the representation of these girl culture modes as foregrounding a more varied set of femininities and of sexual identities. Each of these feminist modes of girl culture is also a sexy proliferation of images, but neither cybergirls nor riot grrls appeal to dominant narratives of what is sexually appealing in a girl like the Spice Girls do. It



FIGURE 6. Photography Mark Seliger. From *Rolling Stone* (United States edition), 10–24 July 1997, pp. 74–5.

is possible that the Spice Girls have been marketed as different flavours of sexual opportunity; versions of what a girl would be like in bed.⁴⁰ They certainly do appeal to many forms of voyeurism and desire, as is evident in Fig. 6. But this does not suggest that the Spice Girls constitute only one set of practices, even with reference to girl sexuality. The Spice Girls do produce some strange mixed messages—not the sexy–dangerous mix, which is an art and pop culture tradition, but messages which might be summarised as ‘if you’re with my sexiness you’re with my politics’. If this sloganising does appeal to men, then that seems in itself a new situation, and might have interesting effects on the circulation of the label ‘feminism’, and even on dominant understandings of what girls want. The Spice Girls talk about feminism in a massively popular field. Further, they talk about how what they say and do may or may not be feminism, and about the relations between politics and popular culture. Many people have done this, but not on the terrain of international multiple-platinum-selling pop music articulated as by and for girls. I am not making revolutionary claims for this. I am arguing that it is a shift in the dominant paradigms of cultural production directed to girls which might be indebted to the impact of other girl culture forms, like the riot grrls and cybergirls, but is also newly inflected by an embracing of popular rather than avant-garde cultural production. It is worth further considering the effects of this shift, and what limits those effects.

Girl Power

Both Susan J. Douglas and Kathy Acker have written widely reprinted articles 'defending' the Spice Girls, for the *Nation* (United States) and the *Guardian* (United Kingdom), respectively. Acker, unlike few commentators on the Spice Girls, places their success and their own political claims within a history of feminist activism:

My generation, spoon-fed Marx and Hegel, thought we could change the world by altering what was out there—the political and economic configurations, all that seemed to make history. Emotions and personal—especially sexual—relationships were for girls, because girls were unimportant. Feminism changed this landscape and the individual became more important than the world.⁴¹

While that last change might be related to other causes than feminism alone, it fairly represents a broad conception of the move from 'second wave' to DIY feminism. Although Douglas's narrative about the Spice Girls remains seduced by the utopia of bedroom culture, or maybe because of that seduction, it is also worth addressing here:

When adolescent girls flock to a group, they are telling us plenty about how they experience the transition to womanhood in a society in which boys are still very much on top ... So while it's easy as pie to hold a group like the Spice Girls in contempt, we should be wary when music embraced by preteen girls is ridiculed ... The Spice Girls tell them that feminism is necessary and fun. Hey, when I was 10 we had 'I Wanna Be Bobby's Girl.' Crass commercial calculation and all, the Spice Girls are a decided improvement.⁴²

Many feminists appear to find the Spice Girls uninteresting or judge them negatively because they see other, better options. There have been many feminist girl bands, and some, like the riot grrl bands, are seen to address girls in more authentically, or at least more expected, 'radical' and 'musically interesting' ways. Some feminists, moreover, see the Spice Girls as domesticating and subverting feminism, reducing it to a collection of empty slogans and a conventionally sexualised image. Ginger Spice recognises that 'a lot of people think [Girl Power] is just cheese', but argues that the principle is bigger than their reputation: 'if we can give anyone a bit of motivation, make any girl just sit up and go, "I'm strong," then that beats any number one or meeting any star'.⁴³ Whether or not this is revolutionary (or even genuine), the success of such images in selling records to girls warrants a great deal of consideration.

The Spice Girls' claims about girl power in particular provoke criticism and assertions that they are conservative and/or ridiculous. But the coverage they instigate for questions concerning girls and feminism is not only remarkable but might even be, from a feminist perspective, admirable. Interviews with the Spice Girls across a range of forums—from the *The New York Times* to *Rolling Stone*, from *Elle* to the *Modem Review* or *Loaded*—whether or not they are critical or patronising of them, foreground intersections of feminist politics with party politics, popular cultural consumption, education, sexuality, class narratives, and generational and family narratives. This coverage alone produces the Spice Girls as significant in a way not applicable to *Bikini Kill* or to other recent hit girl acts.⁴⁴

Moving back to where I began, studies of popular culture are crucial to feminism in terms which I can easily appropriate from Meaghan Morris's discussion of what cultural studies does as a discipline. She points to its work as 'an investigation of particular ways of using culture, of what is available as culture to people inhabiting particular social

contexts, and of people's ways of *making culture*'.⁴⁵ This is a project enabled by reference to fields of popular culture, because feminism is necessarily interested in what Morris describes as 'the historical and social constraints on interpretation and ... the pressures that limit choices, constrain semiosis and shape experience—constraints and pressures that are produced by human institutions and that can, and sometimes should, be changed'.⁴⁶ The contradictions of girl culture, I would argue, question what constitutes such change, and change continues to be both the desire and the means of girl power.

Spice Girls' fandom might demand less dramatic changes to girls' positions within established political and social systems than does participation in the riots and resistances of some other forms of girl culture. But the Spice Girls do call for significantly changed relations to the lives of girls as they are. It seems to me incontrovertibly patronising and ultimately pointless to assume that conformist girls like the Spice Girls while more radical (read more intelligent) ones like Bikini Kill. Globalised popular music is not a field of choice in which distinctions between products equal distinctions between consumers, nor are dominant models of authenticated individualism equally available to anyone. Despite the claims of 'DIY' feminists that other (read older) feminists do not understand or value them, feminists can in general feel comfortable with DIY feminism, in which strong girls triumph over the system.⁴⁷ But such claims to agency, or rather such a reliance on claims to agency, is a problematic foundation for feminist politics. Agency is problematic for any mode of understanding how culture is produced or changed for such a diverse category as 'women'. Moreover, when agency is evaluated according to resistance it is inevitable that the agency of some people or groups—the ones with least access to modes of cultural production, for example—will seem less independent and less individual than others. A Foucauldian analysis of these questions might point out that agency is itself a construction of dominant ideologies,⁴⁸ and that the choice to belong to certain subcultures in certain ways is a privileged discourse of empowerment.

The Spice Girls seem to sell feminism as compatible with many traditional roles for girls—and the possibility that a feminist politics may also be a form of complicity warrants further consideration. It may even be an integral feminist dilemma that our politics depend on the patriarchal systems within which they are articulated. This dilemma has been approached by feminists in diverse ways over a century or more, often in different ways resorting to a figuration of a utopic world 'outside' or 'beyond' patriarchy on which a truly alternative politics might be predicated. I have already noted that the riot grrls and the cybergirls also utilise this tactic, but with an ambivalence measured by their reliance on the systems they critique to produce and to articulate their communities and their politics. This recognition of complicity is not reducible to pragmatics—there are no riot grrls or cybergirls without the globalised music or communications industries; there are no feminist identities without patriarchy. This is not a gesture of resignation, because it is by that complicity that feminist politics maintain their connection to the everyday lives of women. Accusations that the Spice Girls are complicit with patriarchal meanings and frames for girls, that their feminist politics and feminist identities are so complicit, might thus be more complicated than it first sounds.

It does not require reference to Judith Butler to argue that those thought to 'pursue or sustain their own subordination' are easily represented as responsible for it.⁴⁹ But I do want to go to Butler's *The Psychic Life of Power* to try and make a better account of girl power than commentary on the Spice Girls seems to have offered. The riot grrls interrogate dominant discourses on femininity—as they put it, 'smash the mask'. The cybergirls challenge the production of gender through technologised images, and even the reliance of 'girleness' on having the body of a girl. They are important contributions

to ongoing processes of negotiating feminist politics. But the hierarchising of such girl culture modes according to an authenticity understood as individual production pretends that neither distribution nor consumption are productive. Riot grrls and cybergirls are presumed to belong by choice—activism—rather than by the consumption of any products: their own products in fact constrain their articulation of alternative girl culture.

But some girls, many girls, buy things. That is also what girl culture consists in: circulating the things girls can do, be, have and make, and this circulation of things—this economy of girl culture—coalesces into the unresolvable tensions of ‘alternative’ girl culture’s problems with incorporation and distribution. Riot grrls and cybergirls are comfortable with interrogating patriarchy, gender, and feminism, but both are troubled by their reliance on the dominant economic systems they are also attacking. To actually embrace the community that these groups imagine requires complicity with systems they claim to be incompatible with, and they produce legitimised models of agency within the systems they say exclude them. It does matter that it is easier to locate Spice Girls’ products, and this ease does testify to the complicity of the Spice Girls in the system which distributes them—to the complicity of girl power. But complicity may not be as straightforward as it seems. Butler claims in *The Psychic Life of Power* that ‘agency exceeds the power by which it is enabled’,⁵⁰ but this is an agency bound to its own subjection: ‘exceeding is not escaping, and the subject exceeds precisely that to which it is bound’.⁵¹

I am unsure that Butler would want to refer this argument to the Spice Girls, and I am uneasy about various aspects of her argument, including her re-incorporation of this recognition of agency’s inseparability from the conditions of subjection into a psychoanalytic paradigm. But her argument in the introduction of *Psychic Life* seems helpful to me in thinking about the Spice Girls’ continual reflection on their own complicity, and on the much-discussed tendency to conformity in girls. This would be an instance of the ‘irresolvable ambiguity’ which, Butler says, ‘arises when one attempts to distinguish between the power that (transitively) enacts the subject, and the power enacted by the subject’⁵²—the tension, to draw out just its relevance here, between imagining and becoming a girl. Complicity is that *impasse* by which agency does not exceed the power that enacts it. Butler’s account of subjection suggests that complicity and vulnerability are as important for feminism as discourses on empowerment—that indeed the two are not separable, though neither are they opposed by one being the rectification of the other. These are important recognitions for an account of girl culture, and if the terms themselves seem defeatist then perhaps they could be rephrased as the vulnerability and promise of identification. This seems the main force of what Butler offers in *The Psychic Life of Power*—an account of complicity as an unavoidable identification with the discourses which enact the subject, even as a simultaneously unruly and obedient girl.

As Butler argues, the reproduction of the subject is an eclipse of the subject, and ‘a reiteration which is never merely mechanical’⁵³ I am not, then, reclaiming the Spice Girls as really non-conformist, or even diametrically opposing them to those models of agency, originality and authenticity that help constitute them but which they, if only momentarily, eclipse. Butler is asking about ‘how to take an oppositional relation to power that is, admittedly, implicated in the very power one opposes’⁵⁴ or, more appropriately still, whether there is ‘a way to affirm complicity as the basis of political agency, and nevertheless insist that political agency may do something more than reiterate the conditions of subordination’⁵⁵ A discussion of the Spice Girls along these lines might proceed through the recoil of girl power’s processes of identification, through the recognised appeal of a political agenda to girls *as they are* rather than as they might

be. In this sense, the Spice Girls might be a less utopic rather than a more conservative form of girl culture.

It remains important to consider girl power's agenda—the slogans attached to girl power and the shifting explanations of what it might mean. The Spice Girls do not rely on an opposition between agency and conformity, nor do they subsume their feminist messages into an account of 'just writing about my experience'. Girl power is open about its limitations and constraints, but there is something productive about girls acting on the world in ways that are widely accessible to the everyday lives of their audience. If this everydayness conforms to generic expectations for girl music, or even for girls, that does not define it as conservative or reactionary, or not without also being a vivid recognition of, and accessible commentary on, the way power and identification work. Perhaps they are two-album wonders, and I have no projections for the Spice Girls' longevity. But they belong in a long history of relations between girl culture and feminism, and they produce both girls and feminism in ways that warrant further consideration.

NOTES

1. This paper is part of a larger project on girls and feminine adolescence in popular culture and cultural theory. Respondents to papers based on this work at the 'Objects of Belonging' conference in Sydney, October 1997, at the Department of English and Cultural Studies at the University of Melbourne, October 1997, and in the Research Centre for Women's Studies seminar, University of Adelaide, March 1998, have contributed diverse lines of research to this project. Over a longer period, defending the possibility of talking about the Spice Girls on the 'Bad Subjects' mailing list has been an invaluable experience. Finally, this essay was and is for Deborah Staines.
2. Morag Shiach's 'Feminism and Popular Culture' provides an overview of the genealogy of cultural studies and its ramifications for feminism, arguing that 'the intersection of feminism and popular culture has never been anything but troubled'. Shiach, 'Feminism and Popular Culture' in J. Storey (ed.), *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture* (Harvester Wheatsheaf) London, 1994, p. 331. Like most commentators on this issue, Shiach notes a movement from feminist critique of patriarchal ideologies to studies of resistance. As influential examples, both Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* pointed to popular culture as pivotal media for the communication of oppressive patriarchal ideologies which women consumers of popular culture inevitably identified with in the course of their consumption. Pivotal texts in the redirection of feminist studies of popular culture towards accounting for the pleasures and resistances of women in consuming popular culture include Tania Modleski's *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass-produced Fantasies for Women* (Methuen) New York, 1982, and Ien Ang's *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination* (Routledge) London, 1989. For overviews of changes in relations between feminism and popular culture see Shiach or Dominic Strinati, *An Introduction to Theories of Popular Culture* (Routledge) London, 1995.
3. While the image and composition of the Spice Girls have changed somewhat since the departure of 'Ginger Spice' or 'Sexy Spice', a.k.a. Geri Halliwell, from the group (subsequently to be incorporated as a specifically youth culture directed 'Ambassador' for the United Nations)—I am not yet prepared to make a distinction between pre- and post-Geri Spice Girls, and they have, at this point, in October 1998, not yet released much audiovisual or promotional material without her.
4. The Official Spice Girls' website is at <<http://c3.vmg.co.uk/spicegirls/>>.
5. During the frenetic period for Spice Girls' fans during which Geri left the group and two different Spice Girls announced engagements and one a pregnancy I was subscribing to a number of Spice Girls' (and related) mailing lists and newsgroups. On these lists, including, for example, <SpiceZone@valleys.ndirect.co.uk>, most fans were young girls, despite the perceived dominance of boys and men on Internet sites. It was also true that on Spice Girls' lists the most frequent posters were men.
6. Anna Golden, *The Spice Girls: an Uncensored Account* (NewBooks Press) London, 1997, p. xiv.
7. Along with anorexia and other body image pathologies, pop music fandom (or alternative music fandom) is one of the few issues which regularly include girls in cultural studies, with the exception of Angela McRobbie's continued work on a range of forms of girl culture (see 'Shut Up and Dance' and 'More! New Sexualities in Girls' and Women's Magazines', for example), and a profusion of recent work on riot

grrls and cybergirls which are more amenable to the general interest of cultural studies practitioners in popular forms of 'resistance'.

8. Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel, 'The Young Audience' in J. Storey (ed.), *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture* (Harvester Wheatsheaf) London, 1994, p. 35.
9. Sheryl Garratt, 'Teenage Dreams' in S. Frith and A. Goodwin (eds), *On Record: Rock, Pop and the Written Word* (Pantheon) London, 1990, p. 401. See also Iain Chambers, *Urban Rhythms: Pop Music and Popular Culture* (Macmillan) Houndsills, 1990. For more closely relevant accounts of the relations between conformity, resistance girls as fans of popular music see Angela McRobbie's 'Shut Up and Dance: Youth Culture and Changing Modes of Femininity', *Cultural Studies*, vol. 7, no. 3, October 1993; and the work of Ehrenreich, Hess and Jacobs on 'Beatemania: a Sexually Defiant Consumer Subculture?' in K. Gelder and S. Thornton (eds), *The Subculture Reader* (Routledge) London, 1997.
10. Garratt, 'Teenage Dreams', p. 402.
11. See, for a range of examples, Charles Eckert's 'The Carol Lombard in Macy's Window' in C. Gledhill (ed.), *Stardom* (Routledge) London, 1991; and F.R. Leavis and D. Thompson, *Culture and Environment* (Chatto & Windus) London, 1933.
12. Though more consideration of the globalisation of youth is warranted, for suggestions along these lines see Lawrence Grossberg, 'The Deconstruction of Youth' in J. Storey (ed.), *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture* (Harvester Wheatsheaf) London, 1994; and Tracey Skelton and Gill Valentine's collection, *Cool Places: Geographies of Youth Culture* (Routledge) London, 1998.
13. Golden, *The Spice Girls*, p. xii.
14. I am referring here in particular to Simon Frith's *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music* (Harvard University Press) Cambridge, MA, 1996, in which he sets out to reclaim the concept of 'value' for the study of popular music.
15. Quoted in Golden, *The Spice Girls*, p. xvi.
16. An excellent resource for both riot grrl and cybergirl references is Crystal Kile's 'Poptart' Home Page at <<http://ernie.bgsu.edu/~ckile/ckile.html>>.
17. See also Annalee Newitz's Riot Grrl page, which begins with dictionary meanings for 'riot' and then the following set of elaborations: 'A shrine to all girls who wish their gender started with a grrrowl! And a tribute to all women who are too pissed off, unhappy, tough, geeky, or brainy to do and think what they're told. As Bikini Kill says, "We want a REVOLUTION!" Here you can find everything for the person who says FUCK YOU when the world says BE QUIET AND OBEY. And remember, you don't have to be FEMALE to be a riot grrl! Let's hear it for tough, genderfucked, radical males, too!!!' <<http://garnet.berkeley.edu/~annaleen/riot.grrls.html>>.
18. From the Poptart home page in 1997. One interesting aspect of the Internet as a political (or academic) forum or resource is that the ease of publication is supplemented by the ease of changing your text. By 1998 Kile has revised her link to *Riot Grrl* as follows: 'What, you ask is the diff b/w the two- and three-r varieties of grrrls? Why on earth should weee tell you? It's actually [sic] pretty cool that grrrl/grrl/grrl has entered the language as such, but it's becoming increasingly meaningless. If these are riot grrrls, then I'm Arianna Huffington. RiotGrrl is in the process of launching something called "Teen Grrl." <<http://www.riotgrrl.com/archive/fem11.htm>>.
19. <<http://www.riotgrrl.com/archive/fem11.htm>>.
20. <<http://www.geekgirl.com.au>>—now called a 'hyperzine'. *geekgirl* is a far more activist-oriented version of cybergirl feminism than others, like *Riotgrrl*. There is, I would argue, already a division between explicitly politicised and populist versions of cybergirl sites, for example via the referral page <<http://www.chickclick.com>>. Neither *Riotgrrl* nor *geekgirl* currently have the home page references to one another which they had in 1997. There also appears to be an increasing segmentation by age in cyberfeminism websites: some which cater specifically to teenagers, such as <<http://www.teengrrl.com/>>; and some which specifically cater to older women but take up much of the 'cybergirl' aesthetic, such as <<http://www.estronet.com>> ('for older chicks').
21. Rather than hanging with and getting together with their fans, riot grrls cohere loosely by opposing aspects of their social context, including the idea of the girl audience—the riot grrl group Bratmobile have a song with the double-edged title 'Fuck Yr Fans'.
22. Holly Kruse, 'In Praise of Kate Bush' in Frith and Goodwin (eds), *On Record* (Pantheon) London, 1990, p. 54.
23. This section of my argument is drawn from previous work on girls' magazines. See Catherine Driscoll, 'Who Needs a Boyfriend?: the Homoerotic Virgin in Adolescent Women's Magazines' in D. English and P. van Toorn (eds), *Speaking Positions: Gender and Ethnicity in Australian Cultural Studies* (Victoria University of Technology) Melbourne, 1995.
24. Diana Fuss, 'Fashion and the Homospectatorial Look', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 18, no. 4, Summer, 1992, p. 714.

25. Fuss, 'Fashion and the Homospectatorial Look', p. 716.
26. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (University of California Press) Berkeley, 1990, p. 159.
27. Crystal Kile and Laurel Gilbert, *SurferGrrrls: Look Ethel, an Internet Guide for Us!* (Seal Press, Seattle) 1996.
28. 'Cyberfeminism' is a term usually attributed to Sadie Plant, as many cybergirl and cyberfeminism sites note. I will confine my discussion of cyberfeminism here to cybergirl sites, but for more information see Donna Haraway's famous 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s', *Australian Feminist Studies*, no. 4, Autumn, 1987; Carla Sinclair's *Net Chick* (Allen & Unwin) Sydney, 1996; and *geekgirl's Seven Issue Itch!* CD-ROM.
29. Andrew Goodwin, 'Popular Music and Postmodern Theory' in J. Storey (ed.), *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: a Reader* (Harvester Wheatsheaf) Hemel Hempstead, 1994, p. 417. In the liner notes to the CD version of the first two records Tobi Vail writes: 'We have been written about a lot by big magazines who have never talked to us or seen our shows. They write about us authoritatively, as if they understand us better than we understand our own ideas, tactics, and significance.' This is, of course, a presumption no one challenges with reference to the Spice Girls. Bikini Kill feel they are being misunderstood as popular: 'We want to be an underground band ... We don't want to be featured in *Newsweek* magazine.'
30. Kathy Bail, 'DIY Feminism' in K. Bail (ed.), *DIY Feminism* (Allen & Unwin) Sydney, 1996, p. 3.
31. On globalisation see Grossberg, 'Cultural Studies, Modern Logics, and Theories of Globalisation' in A. McRobbie (eds), *Back to Reality?: Social Experience and Cultural Studies* (Manchester University Press) Manchester, 1997; and Simon During, 'Popular Culture on a Global Scale: a Challenge for Cultural Studies?', *Critical Inquiry*, no. 27, Summer, 1997. Both Grossberg and During distinguish between trans-national economics and globalisation as a dominant idea of the global in relation to which markets, among other things, are established.
32. Cross, 'Geekgirl: Why grrrls Need Modems' in K. Bail (ed.), *DIY Feminism* (Allen & Unwin) Sydney, 1996, p. 80. The Geekgirl merchandise page is very interesting in this light, as is their current home page which includes the slogan/caption 'Happy to endorse kewl products' <<http://www.geekgirl.com.au/>>.
33. Cross, 'Why Grrrls Need Modems', p. 84.
34. A Guerilla Girls home page is at <<http://www.everyday.demon.co.uk/guerilla/index.html>>.
35. Bernadette Flynn, 'VNS Matrix and Virginia Barratt', *Continuum: the Australian Journal of Media and Culture*, vol. 8, no. 1, 1994, p. 421. Under the aegis of VNS Matrix you can locate various cybergirl identities, artifacts and realms, like Genderfilth world: 'Tired of bleaching the grime of social conditioning? Then join our tribe of anarchogendataterrorists in Gender Filth World. Explode the binary with deviant software bombs! Feel your gender markings dissolve! (Children admitted free.)' The VNS matrix home page is at <<http://sysx.apana.org.au/artists/vns>>. Genderfilth world is at <<http://sysx.apana.org.au/artists/vns/themepark.html>>.
36. 'A Cyber Feminist Manifesto for the 21st Century', <<http://sysx.apana.org.au/artists/vns/manifesto.html>>
37. Leslie Harpold, 'Courtney Love = RiotGrrl' <<http://www.riotgrrl.com/archive/fem10.htm>>.
38. This interview with the *Spectator* is discussed by Golden, among others. The editorial comment accompanying this interview asked whether the politics of the Spice Girls would influence the upcoming British election. Over following weeks a range of politicians from all sides tried to be endorsed by, and to endorse, the Spice Girls. It was subsequently revealed that the Spice Girls' individual political allegiances split neatly into two Tory, two Labour, and one floating anarchist; and Tony Blair won the negotiated Spice Girl Vote, and the election.
39. The Spice Girls gave their first live concert in Turkey—a choice which might be seen to embrace the globalism that supports them, or as finding an exotic scene for a dress rehearsal. In Turkey, perhaps, the quality of the Girls' performance is more carefully muted by rarity and/or exoticism. Yet the international press agencies were watching and the major industry publications sent representatives to see if the Spice Girls could sing and dance.
40. This part of my argument is specifically indebted to conversations and arguments on the Bad Subjects mailing list and, in particular to the contributions of Laura Wedner, David Hawkes, /dave/McGregor, Doug Henwood, Kelley Crouse and Sara Murphy.
41. Kathy Acker, 'It's a Spicey Life Vibey Thing', *Age* (reprinted from the *Guardian*), 7 June 1997, p. C1.
42. Susan J. Douglas, 'Girl Power Puts a New Spice into Feminist Debate', *Nation*, 25 August–1 September 1997, p. 29.
43. Golden, *The Spice Girls*, p. 91.
44. Yet no other recent pop phenomenon has also inspired such hatred, like the Yahoo search engine specialising in Anti-Spice Girls, or the popular 'Slap A Spice Girl' home page and computer game. You hit the bouncing Spice Girls with a big hand to bites of their music and smack and ouch sounds (complete

with distorted faces and the opportunity to hit Thatcher as well). The site includes the following disclaimer: 'Note for those ultra-sensitive losers who complained to us: This game does not in any way condone hitting women. It makes a joke out of delivering a cartoon slap to the manufactured, Tory loving, plastic, cartoon phenonenen [sic] that is the Spice Girls. The game delivers a pretend slap to pretend people making pretend music in a pretend showbiz world. We do not advocate violence against women in any shape or form. So fucking lighten up!' <<http://www.urban75.com/Punch/bashbeta.html>>.

45. Meaghan Morris, 'A Question of Cultural Studies' in A. McRobbie (ed.), *Back to Reality?: Social Experience and Cultural Studies* (Manchester University Press) Manchester, 1997, p. 43.
46. Morris, 'A Question of Cultural Studies', p. 50.
47. See Bail's introduction to *DIY feminism*, which describes it as a 'generational shift [which] stems from young women's inability to find models of personal identity within the broader and seemingly institutionalised feminism established by older women' (Bail, 'DIY Feminism', p. 3).
48. See, for example, Michel Foucault, 'Power and Strategies' in C. Gordon (ed.), *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977* (Pantheon) London, 1980.
49. Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford University Press) Stanford, CA, 1997, p. 6. In this context I am utilising only the introductory chapter of this text. Although the progression of Butler's project to find a useful intersection between Foucault and Lacan in this text might be relevant here it will have to be done elsewhere.
50. Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, p. 15.
51. Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, p. 17.
52. Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, p. 15.
53. Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, p. 16.
54. Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, p. 17.
55. Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, pp. 29–30.